

# Opinion

## Letters



### That is not correct

To the Colby Free Press:  
 To respond to the article in last Monday's Colby Free Press concerning a study on "Workers Compensation in Kansas," prepared by the Docking Institute at Hays and commissioned by the Coalition for Workplace Safety, at least one of the conclusions presented is just clearly wrong.  
 Stated in the headline of the article, and again referenced in a quotation from the chairperson of the Coalition, is that workers compensation laws favor employers.  
 A key finding of the study listed a few paragraphs later is that only 58 percent of insurance premium collected is paid out as a benefit to workers.  
 That indicates not that the system favors employers who pay the premium, but that the law favors the insurance companies that enjoy a 72 percent mark up on their services — services, it should be noted, that employers are required by law to purchase from insurance companies.

Patrick Toth  
 Colby  
 (Letter #18)

### Your support is appreciated

To the Colby Free Press:  
 On behalf of the Thomas County American Red Cross, "Thank you!" to everyone who helped us celebrate Red Cross month by attending our potato bar.  
 With donations being down, we are reassured that the people of Thomas County support us. We are only able to exist through volunteers and the generosity of the people of Thomas County.  
 Special thanks to Karen Hodson, the residents and staff at Fairview Estates who graciously shared their facility with us.  
 Mary Smith  
 Chapter Manager  
 Thomas County American Red Cross  
 Colby  
 (Letter #19)

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail td@nwkansans.com.

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- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521
- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 1519 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715
- State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorrison@ink.org web:http://www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorrison
- State Sen. Stan Clark, State Capitol Building Rm. 449-N, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7399 e mail: sclark@ink.org

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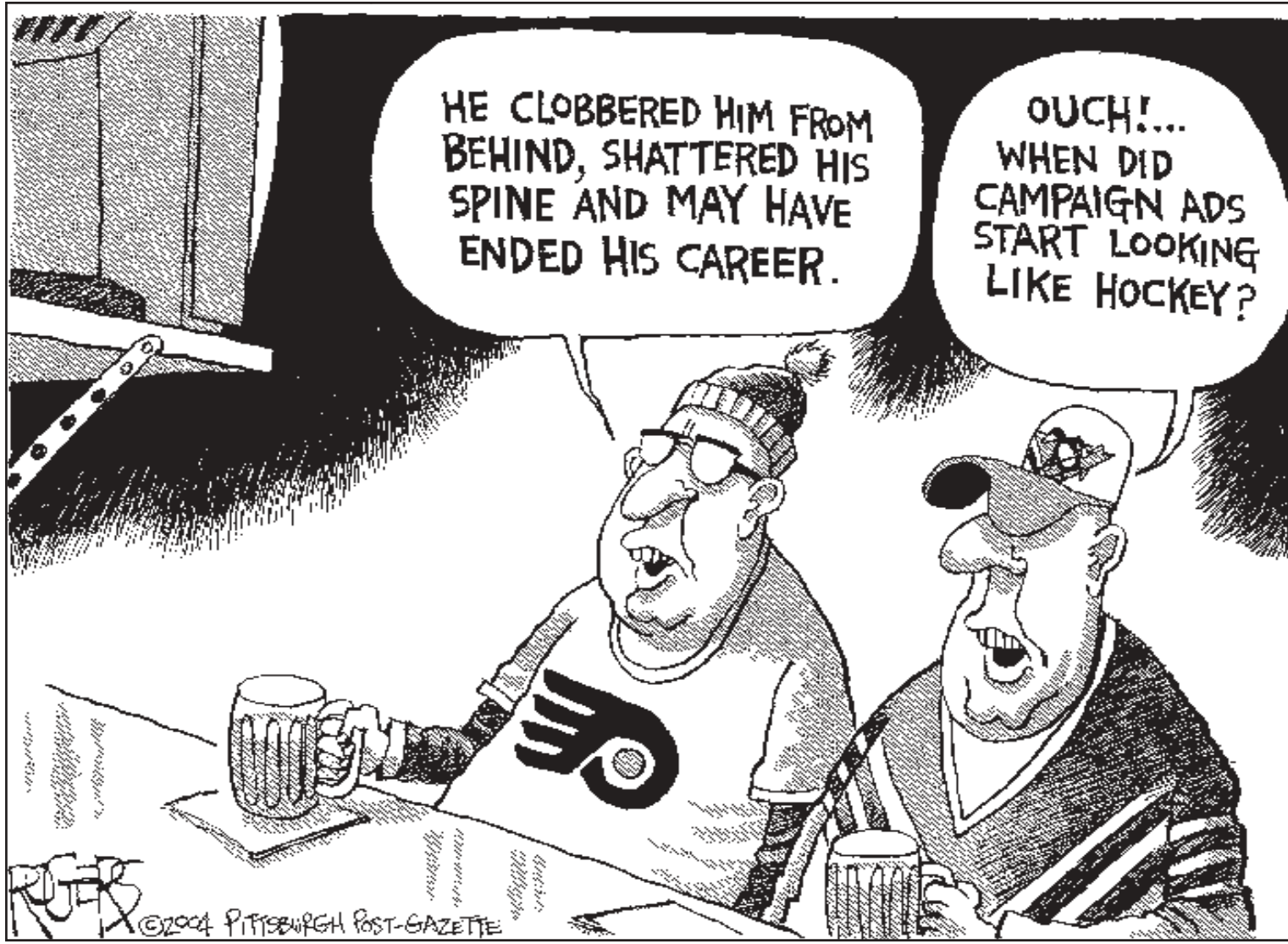
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## Patience is the name of the game

When Medicare bought my husband a power wheelchair about a year ago, we had to buy a handicap van to transport it. There are no sidewalks where we live, so we drove around in the house, wrecking destruction on the furniture. It is really difficult to drive it down the hall and make the turn into the bedrooms and bathroom.

I wish he could have had it when he was still able to get around more. He took it out in the yard and garden a few times, but by the time he got it, he was pretty well house confined, except to go to the doctor.

Power chairs are nice, but not really what I want to go tooling down the street or public highway in. Some people do — but they are braver than I am.

There are several places which advertise power wheelchairs on TV, and even promise if they pre-qualify you and Medicare doesn't pay, you can still keep the chair for free. It takes a doctor's recommendation. There are lot more such companies advertising now than there were then, and from some of the ads on TV, you'd think you didn't need very much wrong with you to qualify. I understand Medicare is tightening up on its qualifications.

But we got the chair so we would be able to go places, and attend functions in public places, such as the high school which is accessible as far as steps are concerned, but a long walk to the door; so the next step was to look into buying a handicap van.

We started shopping in July. I found a used minivan with a lift advertised in the Hays newspaper, and since it was available and fairly close, asked them to bring it up. The salesman said he would bring it that evening. I said "Bring it during the day light." He showed up at 9:30 p.m. just after dark.

It drove nicely, and I liked it, but said I would never think of buying a van I hadn't seen in daylight. So he came back two nights later.

My husband drove the power chair onto the lift and it became apparent as the lift ascended



Maxine Nelson  
 • Random Thoughts

that there was not enough headroom. My poor husband had to bend over to get in and then sit all scrunched up. That van was not going to work. Sorry, salesman, we wasted your time.

So I went shopping on the Internet. And I got a quick education in a short time. There are many decisions to be made. First of all, do you want a lift (elevator), or a ramp (drive up)? Do you want a minivan or a regular van?

I found out you can buy a regular minivan for around \$20,000 new, and then have it modified for around \$17,000. Or you can shop for a van which is already modified.

I found several places on the Internet which listed used vans. I knew I wanted a minivan because it would be too difficult for me to get into a regular size van. The seat is too high.

By this time I knew I wanted a power door and a power ramp that would work electronically. (It would have been nice if I had been able to get a remote control for the door, but I didn't know that then. They are available on newer models.) I could tell I needed either a lowered floor or a raised roof to give headroom, and some vans even "kneel" to get closer to the ground. (Well, "squat" would be a better description, but it doesn't sound quite as nice.) The back end goes down.

I had decided I wanted a dependable company with local service — on the van, probably not on the modifications.

I found a place in Minnesota on the Internet which had several minivans in the brand and price range I could afford. I finally decided on a

1995 model with 67,377 miles on it which had the features I wanted. What's really great about it is, it was modified late enough it has the ramp in the "drawer" under the floor which did not generally become available until 2001. (Hope I don't get high centered!) It is set up so it could accommodate four wheelchairs. Both front seats can be removed, and the middle seats have been removed. I have manual tiedowns for the chairs which are difficult for me to use, but I understand power tiedowns are available. Seat belts are available, but I haven't figured all that out yet.

Having decided what I wanted, and contacted the company, all I had to worry about was getting it here. My daughter in Salt Lake City, who worked for the airlines, offered to fly up and get it but the company wanted to do some last minute touch-ups, and it was not available at the time she could go after it.

So we went to Plan B, and my daughter in Derby said she would fly up and get it. She flew out of Wichita; they met her at the airport, took her to the place of business and briefed her on the van. Then she caught Highway 35 straight through to Kansas City and took I-70 out to Colby. Her husband came and got her.

I used it a few times to take my husband to the doctor, and home from the hospital, and to visit him when he was in the hospital. (The nurses would have come out with a wheelchair for me, but I was glad to be independent.) When my kids are here, they drive and I ride along and use the van to go places I don't usually go. However, I find it cumbersome to use and prefer to use my new walker when I can. But the chair will be useful when I go to Fairview Estates or the nursing home, or wherever, where there are sidewalks and corridors to drive it.

I hope I'll be brave enough to get out and attend some activities I haven't been attending just because it is too hard to get around.

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 Maxine Nelson is a retired editor and reporter for the Colby Free Press.

## Those tumbling tumbleweeds

Traveling to Stanton County last week, I became reacquainted with an old friend, nemeses, nuisance that is very much a part of the southwestern Kansas landscape. While being buffeted about by a 40 mile-per-hour northerly breeze, countless tumble weeds rolled across Highway 160. While I missed many of them, I occasionally nailed a two-footer while bumping a few others out of my path.

Tumbleweeds first gained notoriety when the Sons of the Pioneers romanticized them in song back in the late '30s. I remember seeing my first ones 20 years later. In the early spring, summer and fall when winds howled across roads in my native Sheridan County, tumbleweeds raced across the flatland. Incidentally, I do remember singing along with the Pioneers and I still remember the song well today.

This plant is as much a symbol of the old Wild West as Wyatt Earp, the cattle rustler, the coyote and the rattlesnake. The image of the lonely rider and the ghostly shape of the tumbleweed bounding in silence across the endless plains has inspired a certain misty-eyed nostalgia even in folks who have never journeyed west of Kansas City — except to travel through our state to ski in Colorado.

John Schlageck

• Weekly Insight

In truth, this weed is a blasted nuisance. Even its Latin name (*Salsola pestifer*) identifies it as a menace.

The tumbleweed is also known as the Russian thistle. This plant was brought to the continent in the 1870s as a contaminant in shipments of flax seed imported to western Canada. By the turn of the century, the weed had a foothold from coast to coast.

The tumbleweed can survive and grow almost anywhere. It remains one of the hardest plants in the United States.

Unfortunately no one has found a good use for this thorny weed.

The tumbleweed can cause problems for farmers and ranchers. This nuisance weed clogs irrigation ditches, catches and accumulates lit-

ter, disrupts traffic, causes fires, poses a health threat to some livestock and even breaks down fences on windy days.

In Kansas and other western states, thousands of man-hours are spent each year clearing tumbleweeds from irrigation ditches and railroad tracks.

In the spring the weeds are fought with herbicides and in the fall the dried plants are sometimes burned.

Fighting tumbleweeds is a constant battle. Nearly every breezy day they bound across the prairie and every spring they sprout by the millions.

Although tumbleweeds have been in this country for little more than 100 years, no one has found a reason to cultivate this plant.

One thing is certain: this nuisance weed is here to stay unless our plant scientists can find a use or method to eradicate the tumbling, tumbling tumbleweed.

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 John Schlageck has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

## Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

